

FISH ARE
SUCH LIARS!

ROLAND PERTWEE



FISH ARE SUCH LIARS!

By Roland Pertwee

IN addition to being one of the most popular contemporary British novelists and playwrights, Roland Pertwee, as it appears, like many another wise man, is a keen fly-fisherman.

In 'Fish Are Such Liars!' he has told the story of Old Trout and Rainbow, the inhabitants of a French chalk stream, and of how they come to grips with a fisherman who turns out to have been an old wartime friend. For mingled entertainment and sound piscatorial lore, this book should stand as an angling classic. And full as it is of humor and excitement, the most meticulous dry-fly fisherman will not only fail to find a flaw in its angling science but will even get some enlightening new points of view in regard to the life that goes on beneath the sliding surface of the stream.

*FISH ARE SUCH
LIARS!*

ROLAND PERTWEE



O.P. to R.R.L. 11/15/39

REFERENCE LIBRARY OF
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

2 PARK STREET, BOSTON



NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THE SHELVES
EXCEPT BY PERMISSION OF
THE LIBRARIAN

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.

*Archive
Collection*

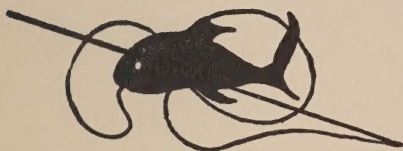


* This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days *

Fish are Such Liars!

FISH ARE SUCH LIARS!

BY
ROLAND PERTWEE



Boston and New York
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1928

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1928, BY ROLAND PERTWEE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Riverside Press

CAMBRIDGE · MASSACHUSETTS

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Fish are Such Liars!

FISH ARE SUCH LIARS!

THERE had been a fuss in the pool beneath the alders, and the small rainbow trout, with a skitter of his tail, flashed upstream, a hurt and angry fish. For three consecutive mornings he had taken the rise in that pool, and it injured his pride to be jostled from his drift just when the May fly was coming up in numbers. If his opponent had been a half-pounder like himself, he would have stayed and fought, but when an old hen fish, weighing fully three pounds, with a mouth like a rat hole and a carnivorous, cannibalistic eye rises from the reed beds and occupies

FISH ARE

the place, flight is the only effective argument.

But Rainbow was very much provoked. He had chosen his place with care. Now the May fly was up, the little French chalk stream was full of rising fish, and he knew by experience that strangers are unpopular in that season. To do one's self justice during a hatch, one must find a place where the fly drifts nicely overhead with the run of the stream, and natural drifts are scarce even in a chalk stream. He was not content to leap at the fly like a hysterical youngster who measured his weight in ounces and his wits in milligrams. He had reached that time of life which demanded that he should feed off the surface by suction rather than exertion. No

SUCH LIARS!

living thing is more particular about his table manners than a trout, and Rainbow was no exception.

‘It’s a sickening thing,’ he said to himself, ‘and a hard shame.’ He added: ‘Get out of my way,’ to a couple of fat young chub with negroid mouths who were bubbling the surface in the silly, senseless fashion of their kind.

‘Chub indeed!’

But even the chub had a home and he had none — and the life of a homeless river dweller is precarious.

‘I will not and shall not be forced back to midstream,’ he said.

For, save at eventide or in very special circumstances, trout of personality do not frequent open water where they must com-

FISH ARE

pete for every insect with the wind, the lightning-swift sweep of swallows and martins and even the laborious pursuit of predatory dragon-flies with their bronze wings and bodies like rods of colored glass. Even as he spoke he saw a three-ouncer leap at a dapping May fly which was scooped out of his jaws by a passing swallow. Rainbow heard the tiny click as the May fly's body cracked against the bird's beak. A single wing of yellowy gossamer floated downward and settled upon the water. Under the shelving banks to right and left, where the fly, discarding its nymph and still too damp for its virgin flight, drifted downstream, a dozen heavy trout were feeding thoughtfully and selectively.

SUCH LIARS!

‘If only some angler would catch one of them, I might slip in and occupy the place before it gets known there’s a vacancy.’

But this uncharitable hope was not fulfilled, and with another whisk of his tail he propelled himself into the unknown waters upstream. A couple of strands of rusty barbed wire, relic of the war, spanned the shallows from bank to bank. Passing beneath them he came to a narrow reach shaded by willows, to the first of which was nailed a board bearing the words *Pêche Réservee*. He had passed out of the communal into private water — water running languidly over manes of emerald weed between clumps of alder, willow herb, tall crimson sorrel and masses of yellow iris. Ahead, like an apple-green

FISH ARE

rampart, rose the wooded heights of a forest; on either side were flat meadows of yellowing hay. Overhead, the vast expanse of blue June sky was tufted with rambling clouds. 'My scales!' said Rainbow. 'Here's water!'

But it was vain to expect any of the best places in such a reach would be vacant, and to avoid a recurrence of his unhappy encounter earlier in the morning, Rainbow continued his journey until he came to a spot where the river took one of those unaccountable right-angle bends which result in a pool, shallow on the one side, but slanting into deeps on the other. Above it was a water break, a swirl, smoothing, as it reached the pool, into a sleek, swift run, with an eddy which bore all the lighter

SUCH LIARS!

floating things of the river over the calm surface of the little backwater, sheltered from above by a high shelving bank and a tangle of bramble and herb. Here in this backwater the twig, the broken reed, the leaf, the cork, the fly floated in suspended activity for a few instants until drawn back by invisible magnetism to the main current.

Rainbow paused in admiration. At the tail of the pool two sound fish were rising with regularity, but in the backwater beyond the eddy the surface was still and unbroken. Watching open-eyed, Rainbow saw not one but a dozen May flies, fat, juicy and damp from the nymph, drift in, pause and carried away untouched. It was beyond the bounds of possibility that

FISH ARE

such a place could be vacant, but there was the evidence of his eyes to prove it; and nothing if not a tryer, Rainbow darted across the stream and parked himself six inches below the water to await events.

It so happened that at the time of his arrival the hatch of fly was temporarily suspended, which gave Rainbow leisure to make a survey of his new abode. Beyond the eddy was a submerged snag — the branch of an apple tree borne there by heavy rains, water-logged, anchored and intricate — an excellent place to break an angler's line. The river bank on his right was riddled under water with old rat holes, than which there is no better sanctuary. Below him and to the left was a dense bed

SUCH LIARS!

of weeds brushed flat by the flow of the stream.

‘If it comes to the worst,’ said Rainbow, ‘a smart fish could do a get-away here with very little ingenuity, even from a cannibalistic old hen like — hullo!’

The exclamation was excited by the apparition of a gauzy shadow on the water, which is what a May fly seen from below looks like. Resisting a vulgar inclination to leap at it with the violence of a youngster, Rainbow backed into the correct position which would allow the stream to present the morsel, so to speak, upon a tray. Which it did — and scarcely a dimple on the surface to tell what had happened.

‘Very nicely taken, if you will accept

FISH ARE

the praise of a complete stranger,' said a low, soft voice, one inch behind his line of sight.

Without turning to see by whom he had been addressed, Rainbow flicked a yard upstream and came back with the current four feet away. In the spot he had occupied an instant before lay a great old trout of the most benign aspect, who could not have weighed less than four pounds.

'I beg your pardon,' said Rainbow, 'but I had no idea that any one — that is, I just dropped in *en passant*, and finding an empty house, I made so bold ——'

'There is no occasion to apologize,' said Old Trout seductively. 'I did not come up from the bottom as early to-day as is my usual habit at this season. Yesterday's

SUCH LIARS!

hatch was singularly bountiful and it is possible I did myself too liberally.'

'Yes, but a gentleman of your weight and seniority can hardly fail to be offended at finding ——'

'Not at all,' Old Trout broke in. 'I perceive you are a well-conducted fish who does not advertise his appetite in a loud and splashing fashion.'

Overcome by the charm of Old Trout's manner and address, Rainbow reduced the distance separating them to a matter of inches.

'Then you do not want me to go?' he asked.

'On the contrary, dear young sir, stay by all means and take the rise. You are, I perceive, of the rainbow or, as they say

FISH ARE

here in France, of the Arc-en-ciel family. As a youngster I had the impression that I should turn out a rainbow, but events proved it was no more than the bloom, the natural sheen of youth.'

'To speak the truth, sir,' said Rainbow, 'unless you had told me to the contrary, I would surely have thought you one of us.'

Old Trout shook his tail. 'You are wrong,' he said. 'I am from Dulverton, an English trout farm on the Exe, of which you will have heard. You are doubtless surprised to find an English fish in French waters.'

'I am indeed,' Rainbow replied, sucking in a passing May fly with such excellent good manners that it was hard to

SUCH LIARS!

believe he was feeding. 'Then you, sir,' he added, 'must know all about the habits of men.'

'I may justly admit that I do,' Old Trout agreed. 'Apart from being hand-reared, I have in my twelve years of life studied the species in moods of activity, passivity, duplicity, and violence.'

Rainbow remarked that such must doubtless have proved of invaluable service. It did not, however, explain the mystery of his presence on a French river.

'For, sir,' he added, 'Dulverton, as once I heard when enjoying "A Chat about Rivers," delivered by a much-traveled sea trout, is situated in the west of England, and without crossing the Channel I am unable to explain how you arrived here. Had

FISH ARE

you belonged to the salmon family, with which, sir, it is evident you have no connection, the explanation would be simple, but in the circumstances it baffles my understanding.'

Old Trout waved one of his fins airily. 'Yet cross the Channel I certainly did,' said he, 'and at a period in history which I venture to state will not readily be forgotten. It was during the war, my dear young friend, and I was brought in a can, in company with a hundred yearlings, to this river, or rather the upper reaches of this river, by a young officer who wished to further an entente between English and French fish even as the war was doing with the mankind of these two nations.'

Old Trout sighed a couple of bubbles

SUCH LIARS!

and arched his body this way and that.

‘There was a gentleman and sportsman,’ he said. ‘A man who was acquainted with our people as I dare to say very few are acquainted. Had it ever been my lot to fall victim to a lover of the rod, I could have done so without regret to his. If you will take a look at my tail, you will observe that the letter *W* is perforated on the upper side. He presented me with this distinguishing mark before committing me, with his blessing, to the water.’

‘I have seldom seen a tail more becomingly decorated,’ said Rainbow. ‘But what happened to your benefactor?’

Old Trout’s expression became infinitely sad. ‘If I could answer that,’ said he, ‘I were indeed a happy trout. For many

FISH ARE

weeks after he put me into the river I used to watch him in what little spare time he was able to obtain, casting a dry fly with the exquisite precision and likeness to nature in all the likely pools and runs and eddies near his battery position. Oh, minnows! It was a pleasure to watch that man, even as it was his pleasure to watch us. His bravery too! I call to mind a dozen times when he fished unmoved and unstartled while bullets from machine guns were pecking at the water like herons and thudding into the mud banks upon which he stood.'

'An angler!' remarked Rainbow. 'It would be no lie to say I like him the less on that account.'

Old Trout became unexpectedly stern.

SUCH LIARS!

‘Why so?’ he retorted severely. ‘Have I not said he was also a gentleman and a sportsman? My officer was neither a pot-hunter nor a beast of prey. He was a purist — a man who took delight in pitting his knowledge of nature against the subtlest and most suspicious intellectual forces of the wild. Are you so young as not yet to have learned the exquisite enjoyment of escaping disaster and avoiding error by the exercise of personal ingenuity? Pray, do not reply, for I would hate to think so hard a thing of any trout. We as a race exist by virtue of our brilliant intellectuality and hypersensitive selectivity. In waters where there are no pike and only an occasional otter, but for the machinations of men, where should we turn

FISH ARE

to school our wits? Danger is our mainstay, for I tell you, Rainbow, that trout are composed of two senses — appetite, which makes of us fools, and suspicion, which teaches us to be wise.'

Greatly chastened not alone by what Old Trout had said but by the forensic quality of his speech, Rainbow rose short and put a promising May fly onto the wing.

'I am glad to observe,' said Old Trout, 'that you are not without conscience.'

'To tell the truth, sir,' Rainbow replied apologetically, 'my nerve this morning has been rudely shaken, but for which I should not have shown such want of good sportsmanship.'

And with becoming brevity he told the

SUCH LIARS!

tale of his eviction from the pool downstream. Old Trout listened gravely, only once moving, and that to absorb a small blue dun, an insect which he keenly relished.

‘A regrettable affair,’ he admitted, ‘but as I have often observed, women, who are the gentlest creatures under water in adversity, are a thought lacking in moderation in times of abundance. They are apt to snatch.’

‘But for a turn of speed, she would certainly have snatched me,’ said Rainbow.

‘Very shocking,’ said Old Trout. ‘Cannibals are disgusting. They destroy the social amenities of the river. We fish have but little family life and should therefore aim to cultivate a freemasonry of good-

FISH ARE

fellowship among ourselves. For my part, I am happy to line up with other well-conducted trout and content myself with what happens along my own particular drift. Pardon me!’ he added, breasting Rainbow to one side. ‘I invited you to take the rise of May fly, but I must ask you to leave the duns alone.’ Then, fearing this remark might be construed to reflect adversely upon his hospitality, he proceeded: ‘I have a reason which I will explain later. For the moment we are discussing the circumstances that led to my presence in this river.’

‘To be sure — your officer. He never succeeded in deluding you with his skill?’

‘That would have been impossible,’ said Old Trout, ‘for I had taken up a posi-

SUCH LIARS!

tion under the far bank where he could only have reached me with a fly by wading in a part of the river which was in view of a German sniper.'

'Wily!' Rainbow chuckled. 'Cunning work, sir.'

'Perhaps,' Old Trout admitted, 'although I have since reproached myself with cowardice. However, I was at the time a very small fish and a certain amount of nervousness is forgivable in the young.'

At this gracious acknowledgment the rose-colored hue in Rainbow's rainbow increased noticeably — in short, he blushed.

'From where I lay,' Old Trout went on, 'I was able to observe the maneuvers of my officer and greatly profit thereby.'

'But excuse me, sir,' said Rainbow, 'I

FISH ARE

have heard it said that an angler of the first class is invisible from the river.'

'He is invisible to the fish he is trying to catch,' Old Trout admitted, 'but it must be obvious that he is not invisible to the fish who lie beside or below him. I would also remind you that during the war every tree, every scrap of vegetation, and every vestige of natural cover had been torn up, trampled down, razed. The river banks were as smooth as the top of your head. Even the buttercup, that very humorous flower that tangles up the back cast of so many industrious anglers, was absent. Those who fished on the Western Front had little help from nature.'

Young Rainbow sighed, for, only a few days before, his tongue had been badly

SUCH LIARS!

scratched by an artificial alder which had every appearance of reality.

‘It would seem,’ he said, ‘that this war had its merits.’

‘My young friend,’ said Old Trout, ‘you never made a greater mistake. A desire on the part of our soldiery to vary a monotonous diet of bully beef and biscuit often drove them to resort to villainous methods of assault against our kind.’

‘Nets?’ gasped Rainbow in horror.

‘Worse than nets — bombs,’ Old Trout replied. ‘A small oval black thing called a Mills bomb, which the shameless fellows flung into deep pools.’

‘But surely the chances of being hit by such a ——’

‘You reveal a pathetic ignorance,’ said

FISH ARE

Old Trout. 'There is no question of being hit. The wretched machine exploded under water and burst our people's insides or stunned us so that we floated dead to the surface. I well remember my officer coming upon such a group of marauders one evening — yes, and laying about him with his fists in defiance of King's Regulations and the Manual of Military Law. Two of them he seized by the collar and the pants and flung into the river. Spinning minnows, that was a sight worth seeing! "You low swine," I heard him say; "you trash, you muck! Isn't there enough carnage without this sort of thing?" Afterward he sat on the bank with the two dripping men and talked to them for their souls' sake.

SUCH LIARS!

“Look ahead, boys. Ask yourselves what are we fighting for? Decent homes to live in at peace with one another, fields to till and forests and rivers to give us a day’s sport and fun. It’s our rotten job to massacre each other, but, by gosh, don’t let’s massacre the harmless rest of nature as well. At least, let’s give ’em a running chance. Boys, in the years ahead, when all the mess is cleared up, I look forward to coming back to this old spot, when there is alder growing by the banks, and willow herb and tall reeds and the drone of insects instead of the rumble of those guns. I don’t want to come back to a dead river that I helped to kill, but to a river ringed with rising fish — some of whom were old comrades of the war.” He went on to tell

FISH ARE

of us hundred Dulverton trout that he had marked with the letter *W*. "Give 'em their chance," he said, "and in the years to come those beggars will reward us a hundred times over. They'll give us a finer thrill and put up a cleaner fight than old Jerry ever contrived." Those were emotional times, and though you may be reluctant to believe me, one of those two very wet men dripped water from his eyes as well as his clothing.

"Many's the 'appy afternoon I've 'ad with a roach pole on Brentford Canal," he sniffed, "though I've never yet tried m' hand against a trout." "You shall do it now," said my officer, and during the half-hour that was left of daylight that dripping soldier had his first lesson in the most

SUCH LIARS!

delicate art in the world. I can see them now — the clumsy, wet fellow and my officer timing him, timing him — “one and two, and one and two, and ——” The action of my officer’s wrist with its persuasive flick was the prettiest thing I have ever seen.’

‘Did he carry out his intention and come back after the war?’ Rainbow asked.

‘I shall never know,’ Old Trout replied. ‘I do not even know if he survived it. There was a great battle — a German drive. For hours they shelled the river front, and many falling short exploded in our midst with terrible results. My own bank was torn to shreds and our people suffered. How they suffered! About noon the infantry came over — hordes in field

FISH ARE

gray. There were pontoons, rope bridges and hand-to-hand fights on both banks and even in the stream itself.'

'And your officer?'

'I saw him once, before the water was stamped dense into liquid mud and dyed by the blood of men. He was in the thick of it, unarmed, and a German officer called on him to surrender. For answer he struck him in the face with a light cane. Ah, that wrist action! Then a shell burst, smothering the water with clods of fallen earth and other things.'

'Then you never knew?'

'I never knew, although that night I searched among the dead. Next day I went downstream, for the water in that place was polluted with death. The bot-

SUCH LIARS!

tom of the pool in which I had my place was choked with strange and mangled tenants that were not good to look upon. We trout are a clean people that will not readily abide in dirty houses. I am a Dulverton trout, where the water is filtered by the hills and runs cool over stones.'

'And you have stayed here ever since?'

Old Trout shrugged a fin. 'I have moved with the times. Choosing a place according to the needs of my weight.'

'And you have never been caught, sir, by any other angler?'

'Am I not here?' Old Trout answered with dignity.

'Oh, quite, sir. I had only thought, perhaps, as a younger fish enthusiasm might have resulted to your disadvantage, but

FISH ARE

that, nevertheless, you had been returned.'

'Returned! Returned!' echoed Old Trout. 'Returned to the frying-pan! Where on earth did you pick up that expression? We are in France, my young friend; we are not on the Test, the Itchen, or the Kennet. In this country it is not the practice of anglers to return anything, however miserable in size.'

'But nowadays,' Rainbow protested, 'there are Englishmen and Americans on the river who show us more consideration.'

'They may show you consideration,' said Old Trout, 'but I am of an importance that neither asks for nor expects it. Oblige me by being a little more discreet with your plurals. In the impossible event

SUCH LIARS!

of my being deceived and caught, I should be introduced to a glass case with an appropriate background of rocks and reeds.'

'But, sir, with respect, how can you be so confident of your unassailability?' Rainbow demanded, edging into position to accept an attractive May fly with yellow wings that was drifting downstream toward him.

'How?' Old Trout responded. 'Because ——' Then suddenly: 'Leave it, you fool!'

Rainbow had just broken the surface when the warning came. The yellow-winged May fly was wrenched off the water with a wet squeak. A tangle of limp cast lapped itself round the upper branches of a willow far upstream and a

FISH ARE

raw voice exclaimed something venomous in French. By common consent the two fish went down.

‘Well, really,’ expostulated Old Trout, ‘I hoped you were above that kind of thing! Nearly to fall victim to a downstream angler. It’s a little too much! And think of the effect it will have on my prestige. Why, that incompetent fool will go about boasting that he rose me. Me!’

For some minutes Rainbow was too crestfallen even to apologize. At last:

‘I am afraid,’ he said, ‘I was paying more heed to what you were saying than to my own conduct. I never expected to be fished from above. The fly was an uncommonly good imitation and it is a rare thing for a Frenchman to use Four-X gut.’

SUCH LIARS!

‘Rubbish,’ said Old Trout testily. ‘These are mere half-pound arguments. Four-X gut, when associated with a fourteen-stone shadow, should deceive nothing over two ounces. I saved your life, but it is all very provoking. If that is a sample of your general demeanor, it is improbable that you will ever reach a pound.’

‘At this season we are apt to be careless,’ Rainbow wailed. ‘And nowadays it is so hard, sir, to distinguish the artificial fly from the real.’

‘No one expects you to do so,’ was the answer, ‘but common prudence demands that you should pay some attention to the manner in which it is presented. A May fly does not hit the water with a splash,

FISH ARE

neither is it able to sustain itself in mid-stream against the current. Have you ever seen a natural insect leave a broadening wake of cutwater behind its tail? Never mind the fly, my dear boy, but watch the manner of its presentation. Failure to do that has cost many of our people their lives.'

'You speak, sir,' said Rainbow, a shade sulkily, 'as though it were a disgrace for a trout ever to suffer defeat at the hands of an angler.'

'Which indeed it is, save in exceptional circumstances,' Old Trout answered. 'I do not say that a perfect upstream cast from a well-concealed angler when the fly alights dry and cocked and dances at even speed with the current, may not deceive

SUCH LIARS!

us to our fall. And I would be the last to say that a grasshopper skillfully dapped on the surface through the branches of an overhanging tree will not inevitably bring about our destruction. But I do most emphatically say that in such a spot as this, where the slightest defect in presentation is multiplied a hundred-fold by the varying water speeds, a careless rise is unpardonable. There is only one spot — and that a matter of twelve yards downstream — from which a fly can be drifted over me with any semblance to nature. Even so, there is not one angler in a thousand who can make that cast with success, by reason of a willow which cramps the back cast and the manner in which these alders on our left sprawl across the pool.’

FISH ARE

Rainbow did not turn about to verify these statements because it is bad form for a trout to face downstream. He contented himself by replying, with a touch of acerbity:

‘I should have thought, sir, with the feelings you expressed regarding sportsmanship, you would have found such a sanctuary too dull for your entertainment.’

‘Every remark you make serves to aggravate the impression of your ignorance,’ Old Trout replied. ‘Would you expect a trout of my intelligence to put myself in some place where I am exposed to the vulgar assaults of every amateur upon the bank? Of the green boy who lashes the water into foam, of the purblind peasant

SUCH LIARS!

who slings his fly at me with a clod of earth or a tail of weed attached to the hook? In this place I invite attention from none but the best people — the expert, the purist.'

'I understood you to say that there were none such in these parts,' grumbled Rainbow.

'There are none who have succeeded in deceiving me,' was the answer. 'As a fact, for the last few days I have been vastly entranced by an angler who, by any standard, is deserving of praise. His presentation is flawless and the only fault I can detect in him is a tendency to overlook piscine psychology. He will be with us in a few minutes, since he knows it is my habit to lunch at noon.'

FISH ARE

‘Pardon the interruption,’ said Rainbow, ‘but there is a gallant hatch of fly going down. I can hear your two neighbors at the tail of the pool rising steadily.’

Old Trout assumed an indulgent air. ‘We will go up if you wish,’ said he, ‘but you will be well advised to observe my counsel before taking the rise, because if my angler keeps his appointment you will most assuredly be *meuniered* before night-fall.’

At this unpleasant prophecy Rainbow shivered. ‘Let us keep to weed,’ he suggested.

But Old Trout only laughed, so that bubbles from the river bed rose and burst upon the surface.

‘Courage,’ said he; ‘it will be an oppor-

SUCH LIARS!

tunity for you to learn the finer points of the game. If you are nervous, lie nearer to the bank. The natural fly does not drift there so abundantly, but you will be secure from the artificial. Presently I will treat you to an exhibition of playing with death you will not fail to appreciate.' He broke off and pointed with his eyes. 'Over you and to the left.'

Rainbow made a neat double rise and drifted back into line. 'Very mellow,' he said — 'very mellow and choice. Never tasted better. May I ask, sir, what you meant by piscine psychology?'

'I imply that my angler does not appreciate the subtle possibilities of our intellect. Now, my officer concerned himself as vitally with what we were thinking as with

what we were feeding upon. This fellow, secure in the knowledge that his presentation is well-nigh perfect, is content to offer me the same variety of flies day after day, irrespective of the fact that I have learned them all by heart. I have, however, adopted the practice of rising every now and then to encourage him.'

'Rising? At an artificial fly? I never heard such temerity in all my life,' gasped Rainbow.

Old Trout moved his body luxuriously. 'I should have said, appearing to rise,' he amended. 'You may have noticed that I have exhibited a predilection for small duns in preference to the larger *Ephem-eridæ*. My procedure is as follows: I wait until a natural dun and his artificial May

SUCH LIARS!

fly are drifting downstream with the smallest possible distance separating them. Then I rise and take the dun. Assuming I have risen to him, he strikes, misses, and is at once greatly flattered and greatly provoked. By this device I sometimes occupy his attention for over an hour and thus render a substantial service to others of my kind who would certainly have fallen victim to his skill.'

'The river is greatly in your debt, sir,' said Young Rainbow, with deliberate satire.

He knew by experience that fish as well as anglers are notorious liars, but the exploit his host recounted was a trifle too strong. Taking a sidelong glance, he was surprised to see that Old Trout did not ap-

FISH ARE

pear to have appreciated the subtle ridicule of his remark. The long, lithe body had become almost rigid and the great round eyes were focused upon the surface with an expression of fixed concentration.

Looking up, Rainbow saw a small white-winged May fly with red legs and a body the color of straw swing out from the main stream and describe a slow circle over the calm surface above Old Trout's head. Scarcely an inch away a tiny blue dun, its wings folded as closely as the pages of a book, floated attendant. An upward rush, a sucking kerr-rop, and when the broken water had calmed, the dun had disappeared and the May fly was dancing away downstream.

SUCH LIARS!

‘Well,’ said Old Trout, ‘how’s that, my youthful skeptic? Pretty work, eh?’

‘I saw nothing in it,’ was the impertinent reply. ‘There is not a trout on the river who could not have done likewise.’

‘Even when one of those two flies was artificial?’ Old Trout queried tolerantly.

‘But neither of them was artificial,’ Rainbow retorted. ‘Had it been so, the angler would have struck. They always do.’

‘Of course he struck,’ Old Trout replied.

‘But he didn’t,’ Rainbow protested. ‘I saw the May fly go down with the current.’

‘My poor fish!’ Old Trout replied. ‘Do

FISH ARE

you presume to suggest that I am unable to distinguish an artificial from a natural fly? Are you so blind that you failed to see the prismatic colors in the water from the paraffin in which the fly had been dipped? Here you are! Here it is again!

Once more the white-winged insect drifted across the backwater, but this time there was no attendant dun.

‘If that’s a fake I’ll eat my tail,’ said Rainbow.

‘If you question my judgment,’ Old Trout answered, ‘you are at liberty to rise. I dare say, in spite of a shortage of brain, that you would eat comparatively well.’

But Rainbow, in common with his kind, was not disposed to take chances.

SUCH LIARS!

‘We may expect two or three more casts from this fly and then he will change it for a bigger. It is the same programme every day without variation. How differently my officer would have acted. By now he would have discovered my little joke and turned the tables against me. Aye me, but some men will never learn! Your mental outfit, dear Rainbow, is singularly like a man’s,’ he added. ‘It lacks elasticity.’

Rainbow made no retort and was glad of his forbearance, for every word Old Trout had spoken was borne out by subsequent events. Four times the white-winged May fly described an arc over the backwater, but in the absence of duns Old Trout did not rise again. Then came a pause, during which, through a lull in the

FISH ARE

hatch, even the natural insect was absent from the river.

‘He is changing his fly,’ said Old Trout, ‘but he will not float it until the hatch starts again. He is casting beautifully this morning and I hope circumstances will permit me to give him another rise.’

‘But suppose,’ said Rainbow breathlessly, ‘you played this game once too often and were foul hooked as a result?’

Old Trout expanded his gills broadly. ‘Why, then,’ he replied, ‘I should break him. Once round a limb of that submerged apple bough and the thing would be done. I should never allow myself to be caught and no angler could gather up the slack and haul me into midstream in

SUCH LIARS!

time to prevent me reaching the bough. Stand by.'

The shadow of a large, dark May fly floated cockily over the backwater and had almost returned to the main stream when a small iron-blue dun settled like a puff of thistledown in its wake.

The two insects were a foot nearer the fast water than the spot where Old Trout was accustomed to take the rise. But for the presence of a spectator, it is doubtful whether he would have done so, but Young Rainbow's want of appreciation had excited his vanity, and with a rolling swoop he swallowed the dun and bore it downward.

And then an amazing thing happened. Instead of drifting back to his place as was

FISH ARE

expected, Old Trout's head was jerked sideways by an invisible force. A thin translucent thread upcut the water's surface and tightened irresistibly. A second later Old Trout was fighting, fighting, fighting to reach the submerged apple bough with the full weight of the running water and the full strength of the finest Japanese gut strained against him.

Watching, wide-eyed and aghast, from one of the underwater rat holes into which he had hastily withdrawn, Rainbow saw the figure of a man rise out of a bed of irises downstream and scramble upon the bank. In his right hand, with the wrist well back, he held a light split-cane rod whose upper joint was curved to a half-circle. The man's left hand was detaching

SUCH LIARS!

a collapsible landing net from the ring of his belt. Every attitude and movement was expressive of perfectly organized activity. His mouth was shut as tightly as a steel trap, but a light of happy excitement danced in his eyes.

‘No, you don’t, my fellar,’ Rainbow heard him say. ‘No, you don’t. I knew all about that apple bough before ever I put a fly over your pool. And the weed bed on the right,’ he added, as Old Trout made a sudden swerve half down and half across stream.

Tucking the net under his arm the man whipped up the slack with a lightning-like action. The maneuver cost Old Trout dear, for when, despairing of reaching the weed and burrowing into it, he tried to re-

gain his old position, he found himself six feet farther away from the apple bough than when the battle began.

Instinctively Old Trout knew it was useless to dash downstream, for a man who could take up slack with the speed his adversary had shown would profit by the expedient to come more quickly to terms with him. Besides, lower down there was broken water to knock the breath out of his lungs. Even where he lay straining and slugging this way and that, the water was pouring so fast into his open mouth as nearly to drown him. His only chance of effecting a smash was by a series of jumps, followed by quick dives. Once before, although he had not confessed it to Rainbow, Old Trout had saved his life by re-

SUCH LIARS!

sorting to this expedient. It takes the strain off the line and returns it so quickly that even the finest gut is apt to sunder.

Meanwhile the man was slowly approaching, winding up as he came. Old Trout, boring in the depths, could hear the click of the check reel with increasing distinctness. Looking up, he saw that the cast was almost vertical above his head, which meant that the moment to make the attempt was at hand. The tension was appalling, for ever since the fight began his adversary had given him the butt unremittingly. Aware of his own weight and power, Old Trout was amazed that any tackle could stand the strain.

‘Now’s my time,’ he thought, and jumped.

It was no ordinary jump, but an aërial rush three feet out of the water, with a twist at its apex and a cutting lash of the tail designed to break the cast. But his adversary was no ordinary angler, and at the first hint of what was happening he dropped the point of the rod flush with the surface.

Once and once more Old Trout flung himself into the air, but after each attempt he found himself with diminishing strength and with less line to play with.

‘It looks to me,’ said Rainbow mournfully, ‘as if my unhappy host will lose this battle and finish up in that glass case to which he was referring a few minutes ago.’ And greatly affected, he burrowed his nose in the mud and wondered, in the event

SUCH LIARS!

of this dismal prophecy coming true, whether he would be able to take possession of the pool without molestation.

In consequence of these reflections he failed to witness the last phase of the battle, when, as will sometimes happen with big fish, all the fight went out of Old Trout, and rolling wearily over and over, he abandoned himself to the clinging embraces of the net. He never saw the big man proudly carry Old Trout back into the hayfield, where, before proceeding to remove the fly, he sat down beside a shallow dike and lit a cigarette and smiled largely. Then, with an affectionate and professional touch, he picked up Old Trout by the back of the neck, his forefinger and thumb sunk firmly in the gills.

‘You’re a fine fellar,’ he said, extracting the fly; ‘a good sportsman and a funny fish. You fooled me properly for three days, but I think you’ll own I outwitted you in the end.’

Rummaging in his creel for a small rod of hard wood that he carried for the purpose of administering the quietus, he became aware of something that arrested the action. Leaning forward, he stared with open eyes at a tiny *W* perforated in the upper part of Old Trout’s tail.

‘Shades of the war! Dulverton!’ he exclaimed. Then with a sudden warmth: ‘Old chap, old chap, is it really you? This is red-letter stuff. If you’re not too far gone to take another lease of life, have it with me.’

SUCH LIARS!

And with the tenderness of a woman, he slipped Old Trout into the dike and in a tremble of excitement hurried off to the *auberge* where the fishermen lodged, to tell a tale no one even pretended to believe.

For the best part of an hour Old Trout lay in the shallow waters of the dike before slowly cruising back to his own place beneath the overhanging bank. The alarming experience through which he had passed had made him a shade forgetful, and he was not prepared for the sight of Young Rainbow rising steadily at the hatch of fly.

‘Pardon me, but a little more to your right,’ he said, with heavy courtesy.

‘Diving otters!’ cried Young Rainbow,

leaping a foot clear of the water. 'You, sir! You!'

'And why not?' Old Trout replied. 'Your memory must be short if you have already forgotten that this is my place.'

'Yes, but ——' Rainbow began and stopped.

'You are referring to that little circus of a few minutes ago,' said Old Trout. 'Is it possible you failed to appreciate the significance of the affair? I knew at once it was my dear officer when he dropped the artificial dun behind the natural May fly. In the circumstances I could hardly do less than accept his invitation. Nothing is more delightful than a reunion of comrades of the war.' He paused and added: 'We had a charming talk, he and I, and I

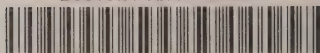
SUCH LIARS!

do not know which of us was the more affected. It is a tragedy that such friendship and such intellect as we share cannot exist in a common element.'

And so great was his emotion that Old Trout dived and buried his head in the weeds. Whereby Rainbow did uncommonly well during the midday hatch.

THE END

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 09929 118 7

109
FISH ARE
SUCH LIARS!

ROLAND PERTWEE



ROLAND PERTWEE

like Aubrey Beardsley, was born in Brighton — the Atlantic City of England — and like Beardsley began his career as an artist before turning to literature. He served an apprenticeship under John Singer Sargent and Alma-Tadema, and later gave up art for the stage, where his talent for portraiture, coupled with a taste for mimicry, brought him success in a number of character parts played under the management of H. B. Irving.

'I had always written,' says Pertwee, 'but until the war I wrote for my own amusement. With the war and enlistment I attacked writing seriously and scribbled away in every conceivable corner of France.' Short stories came first, and in 1918 his first novel, 'Our Wonderful Selves,' was written in a convalescent hospital. Roland Pertwee won thousands of American readers by his sparkling adventure stories, 'Rivers to Cross' and 'Gentlemen March,' and by his thrilling tale of mystery, 'Interference,' which was equally successful as a novel and as a play. In 'Fish Are Such Liars!' he shows himself quite at home in the field of humorous essays.

Says the *New York Times*: 'If you have a dinner engagement to keep, don't begin a novel by Roland Pertwee!'

ADVENTURE AND OUTDOOR BOOKS

WARPED IN THE MAKING

By H. ASHTON-WOLFE

True stories of famous crimes and their detection, written by one of Europe's most noted criminologists.

GREAT DETECTIVES AND THEIR METHODS

By GEORGE DILNOT

The author of 'The Story of Scotland Yard' describes in this absorbing volume some of the most famous criminal cases on record.

TALES OF S.O.S. AND T.T.T.

By BENNET COPPLESTONE

True stories of death and daring at sea in which the wireless operator has played an essential part. Each story is an epic of heroism and adventure.

THE BETTER COUNTRY *By* DALLAS LORE SHARP

The Odyssey of a discontented professor whose search for the 'better country' took him to the Pacific, and back again, a wiser and happier man, to the Hills of Hingham.

MY DOG FRIENDS

By JOHN BURROUGHS

Friendly sketches of the dogs that the great naturalist owned and cared for during his long life, together with studies of dog-nature. Edited by Clara Barrus.

TRAILS AND SUMMITS OF THE ADIRONDACKS

By WALTER COLLINS O'KANE

The third volume in the new series of Riverside Outdoor Handbooks. The two previous volumes cover the White and Green Mountains.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY